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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001214

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SUBJECT: MHP CONTINUES TO SEE KURDISH INITIATIVE AS  
EXISTENTIAL THREAT

Classified By: CDA Doug Silliman, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with the Charge, Oktay Vural, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) point-man for arguing against the government's still-gestating Kurdish Initiative, explained MHP's rejectionist stance in existential terms for the future of Turkey. Claiming that the Turkish political system is already capable of accommodating Kurdishness, he argued that the government's plan can only serve as a threat to Turkey's sovereignty by granting special rights to a specific group. His calm, rational, academic, but still heartfelt presentation suggests that MHP rejectionism is not mere political gamesmanship, but reflects a deep discomfort among nationalists with the dilution of state power over Turkish citizens. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Charge met with MHP MP Oktay Vural in his offices at the Turkish Grand National Assembly on August 17. Charge began the discussion by highlighting areas in which Turkish and US foreign policy are in agreement globally. Vural agreed with Charge's points, but criticized the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) approach to foreign policy. He claimed that Turkey rests on three pillars: national identity, national unity, and national integrity. AKP's policies in Pakistan and Afghanistan do not threaten these pillars. However, its Cyprus policy (and therefore its relations with the EU), Iraq policy, and some of its internal policies pose threats to these pillars.

DON'T FIX WHAT AIN'T BROKE...

¶3. (C) Expanding on this theme of three pillars, Vural claimed that the yet-to-be-defined Kurdish Initiative is potentially the most dangerous threat to Turkey today. First, the AKP is freely admitting to the press that they have no plan, but nonetheless want people to agree to it; they are, in essence, playing a "trick" on Turkish citizens. The very concept of conceding to the demands of the PKK serves to reward terrorism and will encourage other terrorists inside and outside Turkey in the future. Just as MHP believes Turkey should not be talking to HAMAS, it also believes it should not talk with representatives of the PKK.

¶4. (C) Vural expressed discomfort with couching the Kurdish Initiative as part of a wider democratization project, predicting that doing so will only drive the various constituent peoples of Turkey apart. The AKP, being Islamist, sees Turks first as part of the umma and second as Turks, and therefore dismisses the divisive impact of

accommodating ethnic differences. The AKP's plan, he argued, would pander to these differences and erode the three pillars of the Turkish state. He drew an analogy with the United States, saying that because the US is a society based on immigration, one can accept the concept of "hyphenated" nationalities. Turkey, being founded with its various constituent nationalities already in place, has no such concept; anyone found within its borders are fully Turks, regardless of their ethnic background. Turkish culture is enhanced by the diversity of its population, but cannot accommodate separate ethnic identities. "In the US, you go to Chinatown to eat Chinese food. In Turkey, no matter where you go, the food is Turkish; it makes no difference who cooked it." Opening the door to rights based on Kurdish ethnicity begs the question, "Where will it end? After the Kurdish question, will we have a Laz question or a Bosniak question?" The Constitution already provides all individuals with the same rights. Better application of the Constitution may be necessary, but there is no need for a "democracy" reform project to benefit a single ethnic group.  
...AND MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS  
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15. (C) Vural then warned that the US, EU, and other countries must be careful not to intervene in Turkish domestic affairs.

External pressure would only serve to harm the internal debate further and to deflect criticism away from the AKP -- where the criticism rightly belongs. He expressed special discomfort with the possibility that the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party (DTP) is interested in setting up an office in Washington, saying that such a move would give the

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impression that the US is taking sides. Charge responded that the US will continue to help the GoT to combat the PKK, but does support a democratic discussion within the Turkish political system to address the concerns of all its citizens.

The US hopes that the MHP will be a productive participant in that debate.

16. (C) Comment: Vural's calm and reasoned arguments against the government's opening to Kurds do not appear to be based merely on opposition to the AKP, but reflect a deeper conceptual difference on the root of Turkish society and government. MHP sees Turkey's challenges through the lens of the survival of the unitary Turkish state, and abhors anything that might drain power from Ankara or from an over-arching Turkish identity. It finds it hard to entertain the possibility that managed change may have a strengthening -- rather than a weakening -- effect which could potentially reduce the number of existential threats to the Turkish state and, in the process, broaden and increase the power of "Turkish identity" to include all of Turkey's constituent nationalities.

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Silliman